

November 16, 2011

The Honorable David Ralston  
Speaker of the House  
State Capitol, Room 332  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Representative Ralston,

Thank you for the work you, your staff, and your colleagues in the Georgia General Assembly have done to support military and overseas voters. As you know, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) is the Department of Defense office charged with implementing the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act* (UOCAVA), as amended by the 2009 *Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act* (MOVE Act). Since the passage of the MOVE Act, State lawmakers and election officials have gone to great lengths to improve voting rules and procedures for military and overseas voters. To date,

- At least 23 States have codified the MOVE Act's 45-day prior transmission requirement into State law, with others pending.
- For the 2010 General Election, 31 States tested web-based tools designed to help military and overseas voters fill out registration and ballot request forms online, and for some States, to access a blank ballot through a secure, online download.
- Six States have adopted the Uniform Law Commission's model legislation.
- All but four States have eliminated witness and notary requirements for military and overseas voters.

These developments will help expand opportunity for military and overseas voters to participate in U.S. elections. There is, however, still more that can be done. With that in mind, I want to discuss the FVAP Legislative Initiatives. Each year, FVAP contacts the Chief Election Officer and the legislative leadership in each State to recommend Legislative Initiatives that, once enacted, will expand opportunity for military and overseas voters to participate in U.S. elections.

As you know, the Georgia Legislature did not act on UOCAVA issues in 2011. To further expand opportunity for military and overseas voters and to improve their voting experience, FVAP recommends Georgia adopt the following measures in statute or regulation:

- **Codify the 45-Day Transmission Deadline.** FVAP recommends each State codify the 45-day requirement in State law (statute or administrative rule) and authorize the Chief Election Official or another State official to enforce the requirement should local election officials not meet the 45-day deadline. FVAP has found State officials, once authorized to enforce the requirement, are able to remedy unexpected events—and get ballots to voters—sooner and with less hassle than States requiring federal enforcement actions.

While Georgia has codified the 45-day prior requirement for primary and general elections, the State has not done so for run-off elections. *This Legislative Initiative has been revised for 2012.*

- **Expand electronic transmission options for ballot access.** Georgia currently employs both email and fax to provide, or “push,” election materials to voters. FVAP recommends Georgia also adopt a method that would allow voters to obtain, or “pull,” election materials at their own convenience. For example, “pull” methods allow voters to go to an election website and “pull” or download their ballot. Having both “push” and “pull” electronic transmission is important because some military information systems automatically block emails from non-military third parties or block access to non-governmental email systems. Georgia should also exempt military and overseas voters from the wet signature requirement for registration and ballot requests. Forcing military and overseas voters to use often unreliable international postal services puts these voters at a disadvantage. *This Legislative Initiative has been revised for 2012.*
- **Enact the Uniform Law Commission (ULC) Model Legislation.** The ULC, an interstate commission made up of State legal experts, has presented the “Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act” (UMOVA) for adoption by the States. FVAP supports the Commission in this endeavor, and recommends the States adopt the Act. To date, six States have adopted UMOVA. The sheer diversity of individual election laws regarding Uniformed Services and overseas voters is, in and of itself, a serious hindrance to these voters successfully exercising their franchise. Uniformity and standardization of voting laws for the Uniformed Services and overseas voters would substantially ease the burden of compliance, improve voter success, and would help reduce the variation in terms and procedures between States.
- **Extend the period of registration and absentee ballot request.** Absentee ballot applications, including the Federal Post-Card Application (FPCA), submitted by military and overseas voters, should be valid for all elections from the date the application is submitted through the next federal general election. While the *MOVE Act* repealed the prior federal requirement that States send absentee ballots for two general election cycles after the application was made, limiting validity to a single calendar year produces significant problems for military and overseas voters, especially in States with early Presidential Preference Primaries and for special elections. FVAP, therefore, recommends States move to a one general election rule for ballot application FPCA validity. *This Legislative Initiative is new for 2012.*
- **Permit late registration.** Recently discharged Uniform Service members, their families, and overseas citizens may return to the U.S. in between the registration deadline and the election. These citizens should still be permitted to register even if the registration deadline has passed.

These recommendations are more thoroughly outlined in the attachment below. I have also included a chart of each State’s adoption of FVAP’s recommendations.

Please do not hesitate to contact my staff or me. We will be happy to provide research, sample language, or testimony—anything that will assist you in serving military and overseas voters.

Sincerely,

Bob Carey  
Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program

Enclosures:

1. 2012 Legislative Initiatives and Sample Language
2. Chart: 2012 Legislative Initiatives by State

cc:

The Honorable Brian Kemp  
The Honorable Casey Cagle  
The Honorable Robert Brown  
The Honorable Stacey Abrams

## 2012 FVAP Legislative Initiatives for Georgia

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In addition to the explanation of need for each of the Legislative Initiatives detailed below, draft legislative language is provided. This language is derived from the legislative language provided in the Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act (UMOVA), drafted by the Uniform Law Commission in June 2010. A complete copy of the model legislation can be found at [www.umova.org](http://www.umova.org). A copy of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) as amended by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act is available at: <http://www.fvap.gov/resources/media/uocavalaw.pdf>.

Note: An updated 55-State /Territory Legislative Initiative comparison chart is available at: (Website address TBD by 15 November 2011).

### 45-Day Ballot Transit Time

*This Legislative Initiative has been revised for 2012.* Ballots must be sent 45 days prior to the election in order to provide adequate time for voters to receive, vote, and return ballots. Despite the requirement of Express Mail ballot return for overseas military ballots, significant delays in postal mail delivery of ballots still occurs. For example, while the average military mail delivery time to the Middle East is 11-14 days, this is only to the military post office. Follow on delivery to combat outposts and forward operating bases can add another seven to 10 days to the total transit time. For ships at sea, 20 additional days are not unusual. For ballot return, although ballots were returned in an average 5.2 days from overseas military post-offices using the Express Mail services, the delays to the remote locations discussed above still exist. For overseas citizens, the transition between foreign postal services and the US Postal Service can be complex, generating their own delays.

Additionally, accepting and counting absentee ballots that were cast up to Election Day, but received after the election, would further enfranchise these voters. Some States also chose to transmit ballots to voters more than 45 days before the election.

FVAP recommends each State codify the 45-day requirement in State law (statute or administrative rule) and authorize the Chief Election Official or another State official to enforce the requirement should local election officials not meet the 45-day deadline. FVAP has found State officials, once authorized to enforce the requirement, are able to remedy unexpected events—and get ballots to voters—sooner and with less hassle than States requiring federal enforcement actions.

### Sample Language

*For any general, special, [presidential preference,] [runoff,] or primary election for federal office; any general, special, [recall,] [runoff] or primary election for statewide or state legislative office [or state ballot measure]; any general, special, [recall,] [runoff] or primary election for local government office [or local ballot measure] conducted under [insert state law] [for which absentee voting or voting by mail is available for other voters], not later than 45*

*days before the election the official charged with preparing and distributing ballots and balloting materials in each jurisdiction shall transmit ballots and balloting materials to all absent uniformed services voters and overseas voters who by that date have submitted a valid military-overseas ballot application. If a ballot application from an absent uniformed services voter or overseas voter arrives after the jurisdiction begins transmitting ballots and balloting materials to voters, the official charged with distributing ballots and balloting materials shall transmit these materials to the voter not later than two business days after the application arrives.*

## **Adoption of Recommendations of the Uniform Law Commission**

The Uniform Law Commission (ULC), an interstate commission made up of State legal experts appointed and elected by their State governments or commissions, has presented the “Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act” (UMOVA) for adoption by the States. FVAP supports the Commission in this endeavor, and recommends the States adopt the Act. To date, six States have adopted UMOVA. The sheer diversity of individual election laws regarding Uniformed Services and overseas voters is, in and of itself, a serious hindrance to these voters successfully exercising their franchise. Uniformity and standardization of voting laws for the Uniformed Services and overseas voters would substantially ease the burden of compliance, improve voter success, and would help reduce the variation in terms and procedures between States. This model legislation is endorsed by the Alliance of Military and Overseas Voting Rights, the American Bar Association, and the Council of State Governments, as well as being included in the Council’s list of Suggested State Legislation.

Some States currently have statutory provisions that go beyond the recommendations of the UMOVA, providing greater opportunities for military and overseas voters. While FVAP encourages adoption of the UMOVA language for uniformity, care must be taken to avoid regressing by adopting legislation that is less than what is already provided by State law. FVAP and the Uniform Law Commission both stand ready to assist States in legislative drafting to optimize both voter opportunity and standardization. Further information on UMOVA is available at [www.umova.org](http://www.umova.org).

### **Sample Language Notes**

*DOD, including FVAP and the Defense State Liaison Office staff, as well as the Uniform Law Commission, nationally and in the various states, stand ready to assist States in legislative drafting and passage of UMOVA in the various States to optimize both voter opportunity and minimum standardization.*

*UMOVA is best passed by minimal amendment to the draft act as a whole, rather than trying to lift the language and place it in various places in a State Code. This is one of those situations where “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” Further information on the UMOVA draft language is available at [www.umova.org](http://www.umova.org).*

## **Ballot Application FPCA Validity**

*This Legislative Initiative has been added for 2012. Absentee ballot applications, including the Federal Post-Card Application (FPCA), submitted by military and overseas voters, should be valid for all elections from the date the application is submitted through the next federal general election. In 2009, the MOVE Act repealed Section 104 of UOCAVA, which had required States to treat absentee ballot applications from military and overseas voters as valid through two general election cycles. Since the repeal, some States have limited the validity of ballot applications to the calendar year in which they are submitted. This is a concern in Presidential election years, when some States hold early primaries and voters need to submit a ballot application in the previous calendar year. FVAP, therefore, recommends States move to a one general election rule for ballot application FPCA validity.*

### **Sample Language**

*A covered voter who provides an electronic-mail address may request that the voter's application for a military-overseas ballot be considered a standing request for electronic delivery of a ballot for all elections held through December 31 of the year following the calendar year of the date of the application or another shorter period the voter specifies[, including for any runoff elections that occur as a result of such elections]. An election official shall provide a military-overseas ballot to a voter who makes a standing request for each election to which the request is applicable. A covered voter who is entitled to receive a military-overseas ballot for a primary election under this subsection is entitled to receive a military-overseas ballot for the general election.*

### **Late Registration Procedures**

Recently discharged Uniformed Service members and their accompanying families or overseas citizens returning to the U.S., may become residents of a State just before an election, but not in time to register by the State's deadline and vote. The adoption of special procedures for late registration would allow these citizens to register and vote in the upcoming election.

### **Sample Language**

*An individual who has been discharged or separated from the Uniformed Services, the Merchant Marine, an accompanying family member, or a citizen who is returning from outside the United States, too late to register by the regular State deadline shall be entitled to register and vote in that election if they so notify the registrar for the address at which they claimed as their residence prior to the discharge or return to the United States before the day of the election, and if they would otherwise have been qualified to register to vote.*